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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 000361

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [BD](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: HOME MINISTER ASSURES PEACE CORPS OF FULL PROTECTION

REF: A. DHAKA 0352

[1](#)B. DHAKA 0353

Classified By: A/DCM D.C. McCullough, reason para 1.4d

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Home Minister of State Babar told Peace Corps Chief of Security that security would be tightened at all Peace Corps sites and urged Peace Corps Volunteers (PCV) are staying and urged that the organization remain in Bangladesh so as not to give in to the terrorists.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On January 23, Charge and Peace Corps Chief of Security Pat Hogan called on Home Minister of State Lutfuzzaman Babar to discuss the prevailing security situation in Bangladesh. Peace Corps Bangladesh Country Director Silas Kenala, Home Secretary Hossain, Joint Secretary Akhtar Ahmed, and RLA (notetaker) also attended.

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Reftels report Babar's remarks on the massive manhunt for fugitive JMB leaders and the BDG's determination to prevent the opposition's nationwide strikes from infringing on the rights of non-participants.

[1](#)3. (C) Hogan stated security is a paramount concern for our Peace Corps Volunteers (PCV), and that volunteers and their families, as well as the USG, have been watching with concern the JMB campaign of violence starting with the August 17 bomb blasts. He specifically raised our concerns about reports that a detained JMB activist had contemplated an attack on PCV in Gazipur, about 30 kilometers north of Dhaka.

[1](#)4. (C) Babar replied that he could not rule out problems for the PCV or anybody else in Bangladesh, but that the BDG is determined to protect the volunteers and would enhance security at PCV sites. He promised that RSO and a FSNI interpreter would soon get access to the JMB detainee who allegedly targeted the PCV in Gazipur. JS Ahmed interjected that MHA is also responsible for protecting volunteers from Japan and Korea.

[1](#)5. (C) The randomness of JMB attacks, Babar resumed, showed that they can strike anywhere, and undercut JMB's claim that it was fixated on achieving sharia law by overturning institutions that perpetuate secular rule. He asked that the Embassy give MHA plenty of advance notice on PCV venues and events so he could ensure proper security coverage. The BDG, he added, would also review safety issues for PCV's, their host families, and whether PCV use of rickshaws should be revisited. Babar urged the PC to remain in Bangladesh and not to act preemptively in a way that would undercut the BDG's strong counter-terrorism stance. "We are fighting very hard. . . Terrorism is everywhere and we should not give in to it," he stressed.

[1](#)6. (C) Babar briefly reviewed the BDG's security plan for the so-called mini-hajj, the annual Tablighi Biswas Ijtimah that starts next week just north of Dhaka and is expected to attract two to four million participants from around the world. This year, he said, everyone will be searched at least three times before entering the site, and a huge deployment of uniformed and plainclothes security personnel, under the overall command of the Rapid Action Battalion, would be alert to any potential problem. Foreigners will be pre-screened through the visa process but no one has been targeted for additional surveillance, he said.

[1](#)7. (SBU) Babar stated that MHA and Bangladesh Bank are working out details of the draft Anti-Terrorism Act. The two are cooperating well, he claimed, and there is a plan for a "special cell" where police and bank officials would work side by side to combat terrorism financing. He also asserted that there is no language from the draconian Special Powers Act incorporated into the new draft. (Note: A copy of the draft provided to RLA prior to the meeting has language giving police extremely broad arrest powers.)

[1](#)8. (C) In response to Charge's query, Babar once again to provide to us case documents pertaining to arrested JMB leader Ataur Rahman Sani.

CHAMMAS